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North West

The Centre for
**Applied
Archaeology**



Gothic Farm Cottage, Romiley, Stockport, Greater Manchester.

A PPG15 Assessment of a Cruck Cottage

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1. Introduction

1.1 Planning Background

Planning permission is being sought for the partial demolition and rebuilding of Gothic Farm Cottage. The cottage occupies the western-most two bays of the Gothic Lodge complex in Romiley, Stockport (centred SJ 957 911). To the west lies a large brick-built combined barn that formed the western side of the original farmyard. The whole complex is located on the northern side of Compstall Road, at a height of 135m AOD. Gothic Farm Cottage is not listed, does not lie within a Conservation Area, but it is on the Stockport MBC local list.

The Centre for Applied Archaeology at the University of Salford were commissioned by Ascott Design on behalf of clients to undertake a PPG15 building assessment of the cottage, as outlined in English Heritage's *Understanding Historic Buildings: A guide to good recording practice* (English Heritage 2006). This work was carried out in November 2009.

1.2 Historical Background

Burdett's map of Cheshire, published in 1777, shows an unnamed building on the present site which can be associated with the farmstead, although no details of the building plan itself are shown. The farm is also shown on the 1842 Ordnance Survey one inch map of the area but the most detailed early mapping is the 1849 tithe map for Romiley (Chester Record Office EDT 341). This shows a large L-shaped range of buildings occupied by Alexander Swindells which were called the 'Five Houses Homestead'. The long axis of the L-shape was aligned west to east whilst the short axis was aligned north to south and lay at the eastern end of the complex. This probably represented the combined barn, whilst the eastern range appears to have been on the site of the southern half of the current Gothic Lodge-Gothic Cottage complex. The farmstead was owned by John Wright, who also owned most of the other fields and houses at the eastern end of the Romiley township.

Later mapping shows a greatly enlarged complex. The 1882 Ordnance Survey six inch map for the area shows an easterly extension, probably the present Gothic Lodge, whilst to the west an extra range had been added at the north-western corner of the barn. The 1892 Ordnance Survey 25 inch mapping for the area shows that to west of the combined barn two open-sided barns had been added, whilst to the east the large square range can be seen to be the current Gothic Lodge structure. The present boundary between the farmhouse and the cottage is first shown on the 1892 map for the first time.



2. Form

2.1 The Overall Plan Form of the Cottage

Gothic Farm Cottage occupies the western third of the Gothic Lodge complex. It was a one and two storey brick and stone structure two bays deep with pitched slate-covered roofs. The northern bays were rendered but the southern bays were built in English Garden wall bonded brick and lime mortar with the southern-most wall resting on a stone sill four courses deep. Externally there were window openings in the southern, northern and western elevations with stone lintels and sills, but the casements had been replaced by late 20th century UPVC window frames. There were two doorways in the western gable elevations, one leading into room G5, the northern single-storey lean-to which was a self-contained structure, and one giving access through room G1, a single storey kitchen area, into the main part of the property.

Internally, the ground floor contained five rooms (G1-G5), whilst there were five rooms on the first floor (FF1-FF5), the eastern ones (FF1, FF2 and FF5) forming a flying freehold over the western ground floor hallway of Gothic Lodge. On the ground floor, rooms G1 (kitchen), G2 (dining area) and G5 (workshop) were single storey structures.

The earliest part of the complex was formed by rooms G3 (lounge) and G4 (utility/storage room) and above rooms FF1 (landing area) and FF2 (bedroom). FF2 lay directly above room G4 and the northern end of the Gothic Lodge hallway, whilst FF3 to FF5 lay above G3 and the southern half of the Gothic Lodge hallway.

2.2 The Original Form of the Cottage

The original part of this complex was formed by rooms G3, FF3, FF4 and FF5, thicker walls outlining the earlier building. This appeared to be the western half of a single depth, two bay cottage or farmhouse, with a pitched slate covered roof, the eastern half of which lay within Gothic Lodge.

An even earlier phase of activity was represented by a single pit-sawn oak cruck truss. The two blades of this truss were located in the eastern wall of the cottage. Surviving fabric was seen at ground floor level in the eastern wall of the Gothic Lodge western hallway, but because of the flying freehold the upper portion of the cruck truss could be seen in room FF1 and in the roof space above rooms FF1 and FF5. The cruck truss was cut from oak trees at least 150 years old and had Alcock Type C blades (single smooth curves) and an Alcock Type L1 apex (Alcock N W, 1981, *Cruck Construction*. The Council for British Archaeology Research Report No 42).



3. *Fabric*

2.1 *The Brick and Stone Fabric*

Most of the cottage was built from handmade bricks, although single storey rooms G1, G2 and G5 were made from machine bricks. Within the southern wall of rooms G3, FF4 and FF5 several different fabrics were visible. The handmade brick wall in English Garden Wall Bond sat on a stone plinth four courses high, whilst a jagged building break ran from top to bottom of the western end of the elevation indicating that the western gable of G3 had been rebuilt. Internally, it was unclear what material formed the ground floor covering, but the first floor was covered in narrow pine floorboards, as far as could be seen. A large oak beam in G3 was supported by a circular-section cast-iron column with side flanges at the top, whilst a blocked doorway was visible between G4 and the store at the northern end of the Gothic farm hallway. A second blocked doorway may have been located in the eastern wall of the landing, FF1, in the middle of the cruck truss. The most striking feature of the building was this single surviving oak cruck truss. The roof coverings were thin Welsh slates.

2.2 *Fixtures and Fittings*

In terms of fixtures and fittings the most notable features were the survival of an earlier window between rooms G2 and G3, and three earlier plank and baton doors, that were probably 18th century in origin. One formed a low cupboard to the south of the fireplace in G3 and had hand-forged butterfly hinges. The second was formed by a plank and baton door on 20th century hinges leading into FF3. This had a hand-forged latch and handle, although the door itself appeared to be more modern. The third was formed by another plank and baton door into FF4 which had hand-forged strap hinges with club-designed ends sitting on iron gudgeons. It also had a hand-forged latch and handle.



4. *Function and Phasing*

4.1 *The Function of the Cottage*

Although architecturally distinct from the stone-built, gothic-style, Gothic Lodge, the cottage appears to have always been a domestic residence. However, there is map evidence, in the form of the appearance of the boundary wall to the south between 1882 and 1892, and archaeological evidence in the form of two blocked doorways, to show that it was separated from the rest of the Gothic Lodge complex to form a separate cottage no later than the period 1882-92.

4.2 *The Phasing of the Cottage*

The earliest element of Gothic Farm Cottage is the single surviving cruck truss in the eastern wall of the cottage. This appears to have been a closed truss, and its location to the east of the ground floor hallway in Gothic Lodge suggests that it was always an internal structural feature. The original size of this cruck house is unclear, although the stone sill along the southern wall of G3 almost certainly marks the line of the external walls. These were timber, as shown by the stub of a spur wall on the western cruck blade, and the stone wall probably acted as a low plinth. The presence of the transverse beam in the ground floor room G3 may suggest that other earlier fabric associated with this primary phase may survive with the cottage.

4039 cruck buildings are known from Britain, of which 364 (roughly 9%) have been dated by tree-ring analysis, giving a date range of roughly AD 1262 to AD 1793 for this building type. However, 346 (95%) of the dated examples lay within the years 1262 to 1632, suggesting that the presence of a cruck building is a good indicator of an early settlement. Indeed, 237 (65%) of the dated cruck buildings were built before 1500 implying that two-thirds of all the known cruck buildings are probably late medieval in origin. The size of the oak trees used at Gothic Farm Cottage, and the presence of pit-sawn timbers strongly suggests that this feature is 15th or early 16th century in date.

Whatever the size of the original timber structure, this was rebuilt in handmade brick, judging from the differing brick sizes, over several phases of activity perhaps spanning the late 17th and 18th centuries. What survives fossilised within the current footprint of the Cottage and Gothic Lodge is a two bay, two storey, single depth farmhouse, as outlined by thicker walls and breaks in the floor levels. However, the tithe map of 1849 shows a much longer structure to the east suggesting that this phase of farmhouse may have been of three bays before the addition of the Gothic Lodge extension. The surviving fixtures and fittings from within the cottage date to this period.

The precise date of the Gothic Lodge extension is unclear. However, stylistically, its exuberant gothic styling belongs to the mid-19th century, and this is supported by the map evidence which shows that the eastern end of the farmhouse was rebuilt sometime during the period 1849 to 1882. This probably marked the moment at which

the cottage became a separate dwelling, although the boundary between the two properties does not occur on the map evidence until 1892.

During the 20th century the Cottage was expanded to the north and west. It would appear that the two storey addition to the north (G4 and FF2) was added first, followed in order by the single storey extensions G2, G5 and G1.

Illustrations

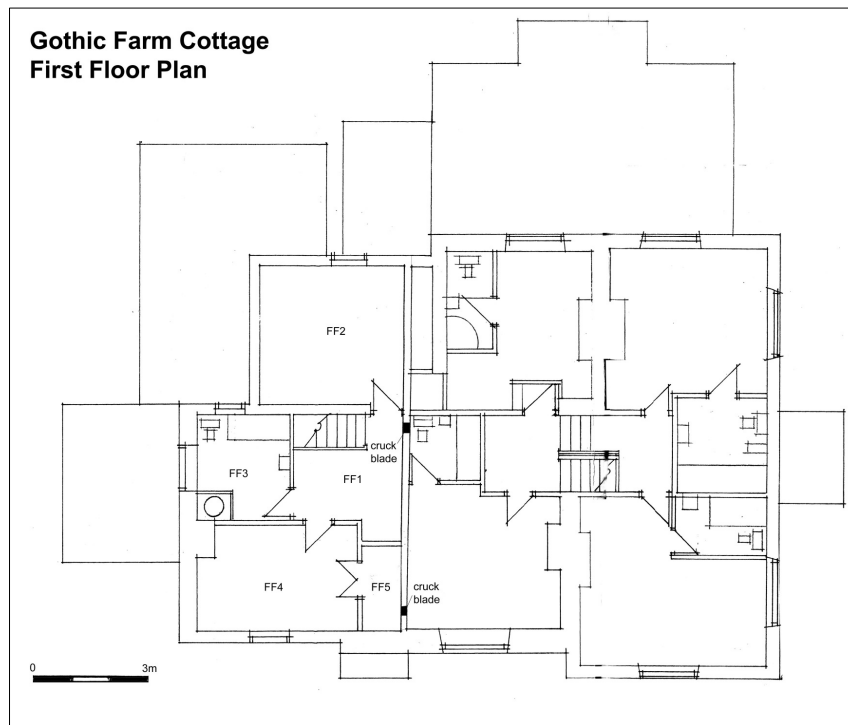
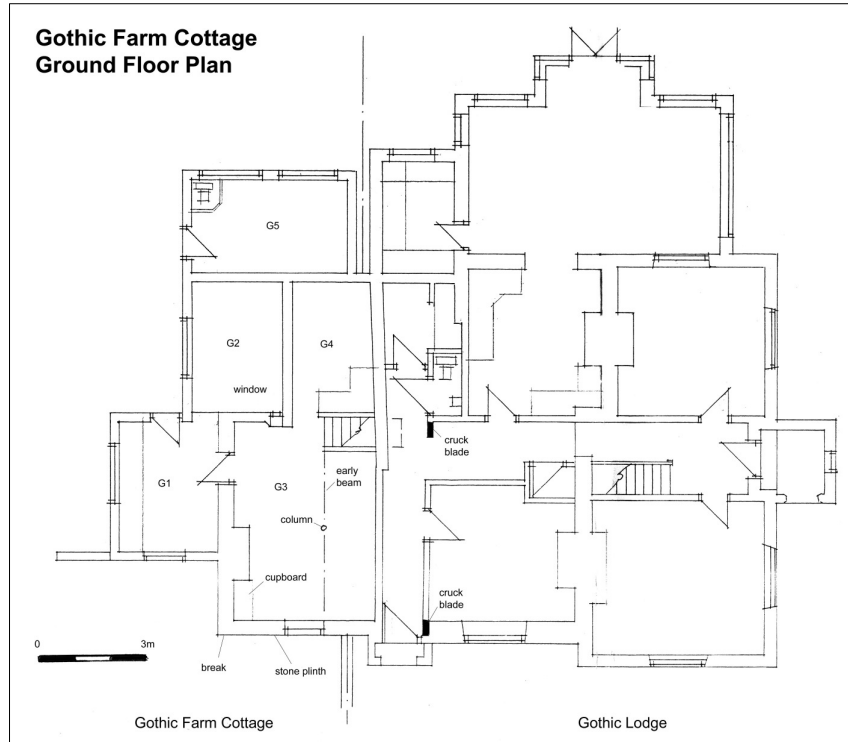


Fig 1: Top ground plan and bottom first floor plan of Gothic Farm Cottage.



Fig 2: The southern elevation of Gothic Farm Cottage (the white brick building).



Fig 3: The eastern and northern elevations of Gothic Farm Cottage.



Fig 4: The transverse beam and cast-iron column in G3 looking south.



Fig 5: The blocked doorway and earlier window in G2, looking south.

Fig 6: The plank and baton door on iron gudgeons and with iron strap hinges in FF4.



Fig 7: The hand-forged handle to the plank and baton door in FF4.



Fig 8: The western cruck blade in the landing area FF1 looking east.



Fig 9: A detail of the apex form of the cruck truss in the roof space above FF1.

Contact us...

RESEARCH AND TEACHING

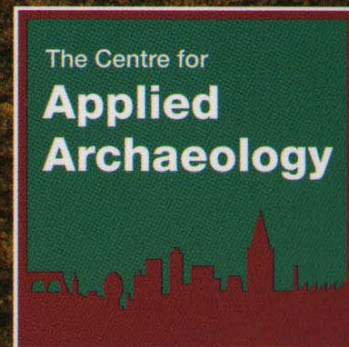
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